

Amendments to the Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A binder for a document or the like comprising:
a base portion having a width direction and a longitudinal direction;
a ring provided on said base portion that can change in position between a closed ring position for binding a document or the like and an open ring position in which the closed ring is partly opened to allow filing of a document or the like; and

a switching mechanism provided on said base portion for switching between said closed ring position and said open ring position,

wherein said ring comprises a first ring member having an end and a second ring member having an end, the closed ring position being achieved when said ends are in contact with each other and the open ring position being achieved when said ends are spaced apart from each other so as to create an open portion between said ends, and

said switching mechanism includes a switching lever swingably attached to said base portion, and when the switching lever is swung from a state in which said ring is in the closed ring position, the first ring member and the second ring member move away from each other simultaneously ~~whereby an~~ to create said open portion is formed above a central portion, with respect to the width direction, of the base portion, and the switching lever passes through the open portion to come to a retracted state.

2. (Previously Presented) A binder for a document or the like according to claim 1, wherein said ring comprises a plurality of rings arranged along the longitudinal direction of said base portion with a spacing therebetween, and said switching mechanism is adapted in such a way that when each of said rings is in the open ring position, the switching lever can pass through an open portion of each ring.

3. (Canceled)

4. (Canceled)

5. (Previously Presented) A binder for a document or the like according to claim 1, wherein said switching lever has a base end portion hinged to said base portion and a free end to be operated, said base end portion being provided with a cam portion for adjusting the degree of opening of each of said rings in accordance with the swing position of the free end.

6. (Previously Presented) A binder for a document or the like according to claim 1, wherein said base portion has a base body made of a metal plate, a cover portion that rises from the base body in such a way as to cover a central portion of the base body and a bearing portion provided on the cover portion, said bearing portion constituting a part of a hinge of said switching lever.

7. (Original) A binder for a document or the like according to claim 1, wherein said switching mechanism has two support members arranged side by side on said base portion, each of the support members can be inclined in a sideways direction perpendicular to the longitudinal direction of the base portion, said first ring member is supported on one of the support members, said second ring member is supported on the other of the support members, and between at least one of said support members and the base portion is provided an elastic member that biases the support member in such a direction as to cause the ends of the ring members to move away from each other.

8. (Previously Presented) A binder for a document or the like according to claim 7, wherein said support members are constructed in the form of strip-like members made of metal plates having respective one side edge portions and opposite side edge portions, one side edge portion of each of the support members is hinged to said base portion, the opposite side edge portions of the support portions partly overlap each other on the base portion, and said elastic member is provided at least between one of the support members and the base portion.

9. (Previously Presented) A binder for a document or the like according to claim 1, wherein said ring comprises two said rings arranged along the longitudinal direction of said base portion with a spacing therebetween; among first ring members and second ring members constituting the two rings, each of the first ring member pair and the second ring member pair is formed by bending a single metal wire; a connecting portion between the first ring members and a connecting portion between the second ring members respectively have press portions arranged close to and parallel to each other in the central region of the base body and support portions serving as pivots of the first ring members and the second ring members; each support portion is supported in a rotatable manner relative to said base body; and said press portion is pressed by a cam portion of said switching lever.

10. (Previously Presented) A binder for a document or the like according to claim 9, wherein said base portion has a base body made of a metal plate and a bearing portion provided on a central portion of the base body, said bearing member has a bottom plate and two standing tabs opposed to each other that rise from the bottom plate, a base end portion of said switching lever is hinged to both the standing tabs, and said press portion is disposed between said standing tabs.

11. (Previously Presented) A binder for a document or the like according to claim 9, wherein an abutment plate that is movable along the press portion is provided between said press portion and said cam portion, and teeth engaging each other are provided on a surface of the abutment plate and a circumferential surface of said cam portion.

12. (Previously Presented) A binder for a document or the like according to claim 1, wherein when said ring is in the open ring position, said switching lever passes through the open portion of the ring and comes to a position opposite to the position of the switching lever at the time when the ring is in the closed position with respect to the ring in between.

13. (Previously Presented) A binder for a document or the like according to claim 1, wherein said ring comprises a plurality of rings arranged along the longitudinal direction of said base portion with a spacing therebetween, and said switching lever assumes a closed ring position keeping state for keeping said plurality of rings in the closed ring position at a position outside the rings and assumes, after passing through the open portion of the rings when the rings are in the open ring position, a retracted state in which it is retracted to a position outside the plurality of rings that is opposite to the position of the switching lever in said closed ring keeping state with respect to said plurality of rings in between.

14. (Previously Presented) A binder for a document or the like comprising:
a base portion having a width direction and a longitudinal direction;
a ring provided on said base portion that can change in position between a closed ring position for binding a document or the like and an open ring position in which the closed ring is partly opened to allow filing of a document or the like; and
a switching mechanism provided on said base portion for switching between said closed ring position and said open ring position,

wherein said ring comprises a first ring member and a second ring member, the closed ring position being achieved when ends of the first and second ring members are in contact with each other and the open ring position being achieved when said ends are spaced apart from each other so as to create an open portion between said ends, and

said switching mechanism including a switching lever swingably attached to said base portion, such that when the switching lever is swung from a state in which said ring is in the closed ring position, said ends of the first and second ring members move away respectively from each other ~~whereby an~~ to create said open portion ~~is formed~~ above a central portion, with respect to the width direction, of said base portion, and the switching lever can pass through the open portion to come to a retracted state.

15. (Previously Presented) A binder for a document or the like according to claim 14, wherein a timing for spacing apart of said ends of the first and second ring members from each

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other with respect to swing of the switching lever is a predetermined timing at which the switching lever can pass through the open portion.